



# JUST MY LUCK

by *Cammie McGovern* DISCUSSION GUIDE

## ABOUT THE BOOK

When Benny starts fourth grade, he doesn't feel that his luck is very good. He still can't ride his bike well, he's lost his best friend, and he blames himself for his dad's recent accident. On top of it all, living with his autistic brother, George, can be difficult. Yet as the year goes on, he starts to learn who his true friends are—and to learn that luck might be something you have to make for yourself.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What genre is this novel? How is it similar to and different from other stories in the genre? How is it similar to and different from stories in other genres that deal with similar themes? *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5-7.9; SL.3-7.1a-d, SL.3-7.6*
2. How would you characterize Benny and each member of his family? What are each character's strengths, and what are his or her challenges? How do the characters work to overcome their challenges? How do they affect one another over the course of the story? *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3-7.3; SL.3-7.1a-d, SL.3-7.6*
3. Though this story is told through Benny's point of view and he's the narrator, the author works to convey George's unique perspective on events and people. In what ways do you learn George's perspective? How does his perspective compare to and contrast with Benny's? How does Benny's interpretation of what George says and does influence your interpretation? Do you ever disagree with Benny about George? Why or why not? *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3-7.6; SL.3-7.1a-d, SL.3-7.6*
4. Benny's father, like George, has difficulty communicating. How does the author convey Dad's personality and perspective on events and people? How does Benny's interpretation of what Dad says and does influence your interpretation? Do you ever disagree with Benny about his dad? Why or why not? *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3-7.6; SL.3-7.1a-d, SL.3-7.6*
5. How would you describe Benny's neighborhood? How does the neighborhood affect Benny, his brothers, and his parents? Describe the similar and different ways it affects these characters. What role does this setting have in the overall story? *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3-7.1; SL.3-7.1a-d, SL.3-7.6*
6. Compare and contrast Mr. Norris's situation with that of Benny's family. Compare and contrast the way Mr. Norris seems to feel about his situation with the way Benny feels about his. Why do you think there are differences in the way they feel? What events, situations, and other characters might be causing the differences? *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3-7.3; SL.3-7.1a-d, SL.3-7.6*
7. On page 69, Mr. Norris uses words and phrases that Benny has a hard time understanding. What are the literal meanings of these words and phrases? What are the figurative meanings? What does it say about Mr. Norris as a character that he uses these words and phrases? *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3-7.4; SL.3-7.1a-d, SL.3-7.6*
8. On page 76, Benny explains about the footprints: "That would definitely be the worst way to get my name on a footprint—where I'm someone else's good deed." What does he mean by this? Do you think he's right or not? Why? How might his feelings about this relate to his responses to George and Dad over the course of the story? *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3-7.1; SL.3-7.1a-d, SL.3-7.6*
9. What does Benny come to learn about friendship over the course of the story? Through what important events and relationships does he learn what he learns? How does what he learns change the way he thinks about his family and other characters, including Lisa, Olga, Rayshawn, and Jeremy? *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3-7.1; SL.3-7.1a-d, SL.3-7.6*
10. Reread pages 193–194. What does the zen story mean to Benny? What role does this zen story play in the larger story? Why? How do you interpret the zen story? What does it mean to you personally and why? *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1-7.1; SL.3-7.1a-d, SL.3-7.6*

*Discussion questions continued on the next page . . .*

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS *(continued)*

11. What would you identify as the novel's primary messages, lessons, and themes? What specific aspects of the story create the messages, lessons, and themes—for example, character actions, character dialogue, relationships between characters, or something else? Does more than one aspect of the story contribute to the messages, lessons, and themes? How? *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3-7.2; SL.3-7.1a-d, SL.3-7.6*
12. Throughout this novel, many characters use and are hurt by stereotypes, from the stereotypes in *The Indian in the Cupboard* to the stereotypes Lisa seems to have about George, as well as about George and Benny's father. List and describe the stereotypes. Discuss what's hurtful about each to the characters, and how the stereotypes affect their behavior. *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3-7.1; SL.3-7.1a-d, SL.3-7.6*

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. **A Letter of Kindness.** On pages 168–169, Benny reads the letter and poem from Mr. Norris. Think about someone in your own life who could use a letter of kindness, like the one Mr. Norris gives. What do you think that person needs to hear? Do you think they might like a poem you love or one you've written? Are there other things you might want to give them, like a drawing or picture? Write your Letter of Kindness and send it. *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3-7.10*
2. **Stereotype Buster.** Stereotypes affect a variety of characters in a variety of ways in *Just My Luck*. Pick one of the stereotypes in the novel and describe it. Describe how it affects the characters and kids like you, out in the real world. Then be a Stereotype Buster—write about things a kid like Benny (and you!) can do to change the stereotype or the ways people use it. *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.2a-d., W.4.2a-e., W.5.2a-e., W.6.2a-f., W.7.2a-f*
3. **Most Important Toy.** Benny's minifigs are very important to him. Which of your toys is the most important to you? Using examples from your life, write about how this toy is important. Maybe it makes you laugh, and you think laughter is good for you; or maybe it helps you understand something better, or you use it to help others understand things. Once you finish your piece, share it with your friends—and read theirs, too. *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.1a-d., W.4.1a-d., W.5.1a-d., W.6.1a-e., W.7.1a-e*
4. **Your Lucky Tale.** Have you ever had good luck or bad luck? What gave you good or bad luck? What challenge did you face when you had the good or bad luck? How did you change your bad luck, or how did you use your good luck? Write your Lucky Tale, and, with help from your teacher, hang it with the stories your classmates write to create a whole wall of lucky tales. *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3a-d., W.4.3a-e., W.5.3a-e., W.6.3a-e., W.7.3a-e*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cammie McGovern is the author of the teen novels *Say What You Will* and *A Step Toward Falling*, as well as the adult novels *Neighborhood Watch*, *Eye Contact*, and *The Art of Seeing*. Cammie is also one of the founders of Whole Children, a resource center that runs after-school classes and programs for children with special needs. She lives in Amherst, Massachusetts, with her husband and three children.

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